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Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Israel's deadly repression of unarmed protesters and tightening the siege in the Occupied Gaza Strip

On March 30th 2018, thousands of Palestinians peacefully demonstrating in the Occupied Gaza Strip demanded that the international community implement their legitimate right of return to homes and lands in what is now Israel, as also called in UN resolution 194. The demonstrations have occurred as part of the 'Great March of Return', a series of mass protests, taking place along Israel's perimeter fence with Gaza. The largely peaceful protest have been met by a brutal response from Israeli snipers sitting on the fence that keeps almost 2 million people besieged in the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of unarmed Palestinians have been killed and thousands critically injured. According to the UN, "Gaza's health sector is struggling to cope with the mass influx of casualties, due to years of blockade, and a chronic energy crisis, which have left essential services in Gaza barely able to function."[1]

The response by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) has been characterized by the deliberate shooting of unarmed protesters who posed no serious threat to the lives of the soldiers. The high number of deaths and injuries on the Palestinian side and the fact no Israeli has been killed or injured should cause great concern for the policy of the Israeli government. A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling Likud faction, B. Hazan, told i24NEWS that all 30,000 protesters who marched on the Israeli fence from the Gaza Strip were "legitimate targets." Human Rights Watch concluded that the murders of Palestinians in Gaza were 'unlawful' and 'calculated' and that Israeli 'officials gave green-light shooting of unarmed demonstrators.'[2]

An update from June 25th announced that the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces is 131, including 15 children and a woman, since the weeks-long massive demonstrations began.[3] The UN's health cluster indicates that since the start of demonstrations on 30 March up to 30 June, a total of 15,501 Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces, of whom 8,221, or over half, required hospitalization. Among the latter, 63 per cent were limb injuries, and nearly half (4,023) were the result of gunshot wounds.[4] . Of the total injuries, 427 were caused by rubber bullets, 1466 are of tear-gas suffocation; 366 of the injuries are critical, 3,746 were declared moderate and 10,699 light. Two paramedics, including a female paramedic (Razan Al Najjar) were killed, and 229 medics were injured with live ammunition and tear-gas suffocation, while 39 ambulances were partly damaged.

OCHA oPt announced that over 1,400 may suffer long-term disability due to injuries caused from snipers. According to the UN agency, "Some injuries have caused long-term

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[1] Ocha.org. (2018). Humanitarian Snapshot: Casualties In The Context Of Demonstrations And Hostilities In Gaza | 30 March - 12 June. [online] Available at: http://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-casualties-context-demonstrations-and-hostilities-gaza-30-march-12. [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[2] Human Rights Watch.org (2018). Israel: Gaza Killings Unlawful, Calculated. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/03/israel-gaza-killings-unlawful-calculated [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[3] Inemc.org. (2018). Ministry of Health: 131 Palestinians Killed, Over 14 Thousand Injured in Great March of Return– IMEMC News. [online] Available at: http://inemc.org/article/ministry-of-health-131-palestinians-killed-over-14-thousand-injured-in-great-march-of-return/ [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[4] Ocha.org. (2018). Addressing rehabilitation needs of Palestinians seriously injured during Gaza demonstrations: Over 1,400 may suffer long-term disability. [online] Available at: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/addressing-rehabilitation-needs-palestinians-seriously-injured-during-gaza-demonstrations [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

disability: as of 3 July, 53 had received lower limb amputations and eight had upper limb. Eleven of the amputees are children. Additionally, at least ten other Palestinians have been left paralyzed following spinal cord injuries. In the majority of the additional cases the full implications of the injury will only become clear in the future, depending on the quality of treatment and rehabilitation. 454 patients suffered severe vascular injuries and 954 patients sustained comminuted fractures, where the bone is splintered into more than two fragments and there is a higher risk of limb shortening and need for assistive devices once fractures have healed."[5]

Further, medics on the ground say Israeli forces are shooting at demonstrators with what are being known as the "butterfly bullet", which explodes upon impact, pulverizing tissue, arteries and bone, while causing severe internal injuries. Medical staff from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) operating in Gaza say patients who have been shot with the rounds have sustained fist-sized wounds of an "unusual severity" and will have to undergo "complex surgical operations".[6] Explosive rounds were banned internationally under the 1899 Hague Convention because of the "unnecessary injury and suffering caused from large bullet wounds".[7] Under international law, when the use of force is unavoidable, law enforcement officials must make all efforts to minimise injury.

In July 2018 Israeli occupation forces introduced new restrictions relating to the siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip, ongoing since 2007. On 9 July 2018, the Government of Israel (GoI) announced it was tightening restrictions on access to Gaza via Kerem Shalom, the main commercial crossing, explicitly noting that the measures were in response to Hamas sending incendiary kites and balloons into Israel. The UN declared in a statement: "New restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on 9 July, and further increased yesterday 16 July, prohibit the entry of goods except medical and food supplies; prohibit the exit of all goods; and restrict the fishing area along the Gaza coast to three nautical miles " The policy of the Israeli authorities against Palestinians in Gaza is having an extreme impact on their daily lives. These measures continue to amount to collective punishment of a population under siege and under military occupation. The water and electricity crisis in the Gaza Strip is particularly concerning. Virtually all running water is undrinkable. Further, families receive around only 4 hours of electricity daily. According to OXFAM "An 11-year-old in Gaza has never experienced a full day of electricity."[8] OCHA opt announced that "US$4.5 million in funding is urgently needed for emergency fuel, which runs out in early August."[9]

No Accountability

Human Rights Watch has stated that "Third countries should impose targeted sanctions against Israeli officials responsible for ongoing serious human rights violations."[10] Meanwhile Amnesty International renewed its call on governments worldwide to "impose a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Gadzo, M. (2018). Palestinians face explosive bullets, dangerous gas bombs. [online] Aljazeera.com. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/palestinians-face-explosive-bullets-dangerous-gas-bombs-180501091514736.html [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[7] Ibid.

[8] Oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com. (2018). Israel tightens Gaza blockade, civilians bear the brunt. [online] Available at: https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620527/mb-gaza-israel-blockade-civilians-270818-en.pdf [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[9] Ocha.org. (2018). Humanitarian Coordinator warns of worsened crisis in Gaza following new import and export restrictions. [online] Available at: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-coordinator-warns-worsened-crisis-gaza-following-new-import-and-export [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[10] Human Rights Watch.org (2018). Israel: Apparent War Crimes in Gaza. [online] Available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/13/israel-apparent-war-crimes-gaza. [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

comprehensive arms embargo on Israel following the country's disproportionate response to mass demonstrations along the fence that separates the Gaza Strip from Israel."[11] Amnesty further states that "the international community must act concretely and stop the delivery of arms and military equipment to Israel. A failure to do so will continue to fuel serious human rights abuses against thousands of men, women and children suffering the consequences of life under Israel's cruel blockade of Gaza. These people are merely protesting their unbearable conditions and demanding the right to return to their homes and towns in what is now Israel." [12]

PRC welcomes Human Rights Council's resolution S-28/1 adopted in May 2018 during the 28th special session that called for international commission of inquiry into the large-scale killings of Palestinian protesters in Gaza. The Israeli government has consistently shown its inability to independently investigate crimes committed by the army in accordance with international standards. Israel has announced an internal investigation on the events, described by Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem as "pure propaganda" and part of Israel's standard "whitewashing toolkit", based on the record of previous inquiries.[13] It is, therefore, extremely concerning that key European states such as the United Kingdom and Germany, decided to abstain and not support the resolution calling for the an inquiry into the killings of peaceful protests in Gaza. PRC calls on member states of the council to support resolution S-28/1 and impose accountability measures on Israel, including economic sanctions and arms embargoes, until it ends its oppression against Palestinians.

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[11] Amnesty.org. (2018). Israel: Arms embargo needed as military unlawfully kills and maims Gaza protesters. [online] Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/israel-arms-embargo-needed-as-military-unlawfully-kills-and-maims-gaza-protesters/ [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].

[12] Ibid.

[13] B'Tselem. (2018). If the heart be not callous. [online] Available at: https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/201804_if_the_heart_be_not_callous [Accessed 1 Aug. 2018].